

21 July 1958

SOVIET LONG RANGE BOMBER FORCE

1. In June we completed an intensive re-examination of all evidence pertaining to the development and production of long range bombers in the USSR. As a result, we have made a slight downward revision in our estimate of the number of heavy bombers the USSR would have as of mid-1958 and a very considerable reduction in the numbers of such bombers it would probably have in the next few years.

2. Soviet Long Range Aviation has increased markedly in size and capabilities since early 1954, when it included about 1,000 BULL (B-29 type) piston medium bombers. We estimate its total mid-1958 strength at more than 1,450 bombers, including about 425 BULLS, about 925 BADGER (B-47 type) jet medium bombers, and about 100 to 125 BISON (B-52 type) jet and BEAR turboprop heavy bombers. Some of the BISONs and BADGERs in this force are equipped as convertible tanker-bombers. These figures clearly show Soviet Long Range Aviation remains primarily a medium bomber force, best suited for operations against targets in Eurasia and its periphery, but capable of large-scale attacks

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on the continental US through extensive use of one-way missions.

3. Heavy bomber and tanker strength has fallen somewhat short of our previous estimate of last November. Evidence received since then indicates that Soviet production of heavy bombers has remained at a very low and uneven rate. BISON production virtually stopped early this year, but recently some additional production has been reported. We cannot be sure at present whether the current model of the BISON is being phased out of production in favor of an improved version or perhaps a new aircraft, or whether the Soviets intend to continue producing the present model. In retrospect, however, the history of the Soviet heavy bomber program leads us to believe that despite the efforts they devoted to developing the BISON and BEAR, Soviet planners probably decided within the past year or two to forego a rapid buildup with present heavy bomber models.

4. This decision was probably affected by several factors, among them possibly: dissatisfaction with the performance of BISON and BEAR; progress in developing new or improved bombers; Soviet confidence in their ability to acquire an ICBM capability at an early date. We believe that prototypes of one or more new or

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improved bombers have probably been completed, but we do not yet know their characteristics. We estimate, however, that the USSR could begin production of an improved BISON at any time, and could develop a new subsonic heavy bomber for operational use in 1959 or 1960. In either case, however, we do not believe the numbers produced would be very large, because Soviet planners probably do not feel compelled, in the interim before the advent of more advanced intercontinental delivery systems, to acquire a heavy bomber force of much larger size but only marginally improved performance.

5. We therefore project Soviet heavy bomber and tanker strength for mid-1960 as lying within the range of 100 to 200 aircraft. The high side reflects a Soviet option to produce some additional aircraft of BISON and perhaps BEAR types, and to introduce a new subsonic heavy bomber into units. The low side reflects their option to forego any further buildup in heavy bombers through this period, relying primarily on their one-way medium bomber capability against the US for at least a little longer.

6. The jet medium bomber and tanker force will probably increase somewhat, reaching a peak strength of about 1,100 in

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mid-1960. A new medium bomber with supersonic "dash" capability will probably be introduced some time during 1960-61 as a successor to the BADGER; a few might have reached operational units by mid-1960.

7. Our estimates of trends in Soviet Long Range Aviation during the 1960-63 period are more uncertain. The Soviets will almost certainly continue to strive for technological superiority over the US in intercontinental weapon systems, and it is clear that they are laying great store by the ICBM as posing an entirely new type of threat. But Soviet military planners would probably feel that even though they had available substantial numbers of ICBMs and some submarine-launched missiles, it would still be desirable to introduce some advanced intercontinental bombers-- with emphasis on such functions as attacks on small hardened targets, damage assessment, and reconnaissance. By mid-1963 they could probably have small numbers of such aircraft, including chemical-powered heavy bombers capable of supersonic speed at high altitude or possibly subsonic nuclear-powered aircraft with long endurance at various altitudes.

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8. As already indicated, they might also produce an interim subsonic heavy bomber during the early years of ICBM availability and prior to the advent of more advanced intercontinental bombers--partly as a "hedge" against slippage in either of the latter programs. Should the Soviets desire a large force of subsonic heavy bombers and tankers (BISONS, BEARs, and new subsonic bombers), there is no question that they could have five or six hundred in units by mid-1963. It seems to us more likely, however, that the Soviet heavy bomber and tanker force will remain smaller than this--say about two or three hundred--and that by about mid-1963 the USSR will be placing major reliance on ICBMs for intercontinental delivery of nuclear weapons.

9. The number of medium bombers in Soviet Long Range Aviation will probably decrease by mid-1963. Supersonic "dash" medium bombers may become an important element in the force, but BADGERs will probably have continuing utility.

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